DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 291 470 PS 017 117

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Hubbell, Ruth; And Others |
| TITLE | The Transition of Head Start Children into Public School. Executive Summary. |
| INSTITUTION | CSR, Inc., Washington, D.C. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (DHHS), Washington, D.C. |
| REPORT NO | BOA-105-86-8123 |
| PUB DATE | Nov 87 |
| NOTE | 8p.; For Volume I and Volume II, see PS 017 115-116. |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - Research/Technical (143) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Community Involvement; Comparative Analysis; *Compensatory Education; *Day Care; Demonstration Programs; *Elementary Schools; Grants; Program Development; *Program Effectiveness; Staff Role; Surveys; *Transitional Programs |
| IDENTIFIERS | *Project Head Start |

ABSTRACT

Reported in this executive summary are findings of a survey and comparison of the transition efforts of a responding sample of 108 Head Start programs (out of a stratified random sample of 144) and 15 additional Head Start programs that received special transition grants in 1986. Respondents included, for each program, the Head Start director, the principal of a randomly selected correspondent elementary school, a kindergarten teacher in that school, and parents of two children in that teacher's class who had formerly attended Head Start. For grantee programs, respondents included those listed above as well as Head Start component coordinators, a Head Start teacher, and, for each program, a school district official. In addition to findings, effective transition methods and the barriers to transition are described. (RH)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED291470

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# THE TRANSITION OF HEAD START CHILDREN INTO PUBLIC SCHOOL

November, 1987

By:
Ruth Hubbell, Ph.D.
Margaret Plantz, Ph.D.
Larry Condelli, Ph.D.
Barbara Barrett, M.S.

Project Officer:
Dr. Bernard Brown
Administration for Children, Youth and Families
Department of Health and Human Services

BOA No. 105-86-8123, Task Order B

PS 017117

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

The transition of Head Start children into elementary school can be a stressful time for the children and their parents. Therefore, Head Start has implemented a national transition initiative in an effort to effect a smooth transition and provide continuity in educational experiences for young children and their families. All Head Start programs have been encouraged to initiate transition activities and a number of programs received special grants in 1986 and 1987 to demonstrate innovative approaches to transition to elementary school.

This study examined the transition efforts of a random sample of Head Start programs and of fifteen 1986 recipients of special transition grants. Volume I of this report contains the survey findings and the comparison between the surveyed programs and the transition grantees. Volume II reports on the efforts of the transition grantees.

### Survey of Head Start Programs

A stratified random sample of 144 Head Start programs was selected from all Head Start grantees. The sample was stratified by auspice (school/non-school operated) and program model (home-based, center-based). For each program, the following respondents were selected: Head Start director, principal of a randomly selected correspondent elementary school, kindergarten teacher in that school, parents of two children in that teacher's class who had formerly attended Head Start.

All respondents completed self-administered questionnaires about their involvement in the transition process. In all, 82 principals, 108 Head Start directors, 80 teachers and 185 parents responded to the survey.

## Transition Grantee Formative Evaluation

The fifteen transition grantees were also surveyed, five through site visits, and ten by mail. In addition to the Head Start director, school principal, school teacher and parents, data were obtained from Head Start component coordinators, a Head Start teacher, and a school district official for each program. Project proposals were also used to develop descriptions of each transition program.

# Findings

## Transition Activities Conducted by Head Start Programs

- 70% of the Head Start programs surveyed implemented a variety of transition activities. They provided information about Head Start to the schools, participated in joint planning, met with the school superintendent and provided names of children about to enter the schools. Transition grantees were more likely to conduct these activities than were surveyed programs.

- Most Head Start programs provided information about school to parents, and about 50% arranged for visits to the schools or meetings with the kindergarten teacher. The transition grantees conducted more of these types of activities than did other programs surveyed.

- Head Start programs reported and parents confirmed that they implemented such transition activities as conducting meetings about school, offering parents consent forms to sign for transfer of records, providing information on helping children prepare for school and with ways to help their children and themselves deal with the school. Although

most directors said they provided parents with lists of books to read to their children about school, only a third of the parents reported that they received such lists. Transition grantees were more likely to provide these activities than other programs surveyed.

- Generally parents rated Head Start programs highly on preparing them for transition, but some wanted more information, more academic preparation of their children and more visits to the schools.

Transfer of Records

- There was little agreement between Head Start directors' reports of sending child records to the schools and principals' reports of receiving the records. Records were passed on to teachers in less than half of the cases.

- Head Start programs were most likely to transfer records for children with diagnosed handicaps and health records for all children. Less than half transferred developmental or social services records for most or all children.

Transition Activities Conducted By the Schools and Their Effects on Children

- Higher levels of teacher participation in transition activities were related to higher teacher estimates of the preparedness of Head Start children compared to their low-income peers.

- Higher levels of teacher participation in transition activities were related to lower child stress during the first month of school as reported by parents.

- Principals reported that they provided a variety of information on school procedures and schedules to parents at the beginning of school.

- In the majority of the schools someone had met with some or most of the parents of Head Start children about their children during the first month of school.

- High levels of participation in transition activities by principals and teachers related positively to greater involvement with parents.

- Parents were fairly active in visiting their children's new schools and talking with their teachers, although they seldom participated in PTA meetings. When parents participated in more transition activities, school teachers rated their children higher on preparedness for school. Also parents who participated in more activities rated Head Start higher in preparing them for transition.

- Head Start programs operated by school systems were more likely to have written agreements, and to transfer child names and some records to the

schools. They were also more likely to involve staff in record transfer preparation.

Staff Concerns

- Head Start and school staffs noted the lack of written transition agreements as problematic.

- Head Start directors, especially the grantee directors expressed considerable concern about the discontinuity in educational approach between Head Start and the schools. The disparity between Head Start's developmental, child-oriented approach and the schools' teacher-directed, structured approach were viewed as very detrimental to the children.

- Both Head Start and school staff were concerned that children were not academically prepared for school.

- Staff in Head Start programs expressed concerns that the schools would not encourage parents to participate in school activities while school personnel and some Head Start directors were concerned that parents lacked the skills to deal with the school system.

Head Start Children

- In virtually all of the surveyed programs, staff talked with the children about how school would differ from Head Start, but only 60% of the programs arranged for the children to visit the school. However, all of the transition grantees arranged for such visits.

- Ninety-two percent of the surveyed teachers rated Head Start children equally or better prepared for school than their low income classmates on six behaviors. Teachers perceived Head Start children as adjusting to school the same or better than their peers.

- Parents reported few behavioral symptoms of stress in their children during the first month of school. However, parents reported high levels of self-confidence, liking of school and happiness during Head Start. These levels dropped, especially for self-confidence and especially for the children rated the highest during the first month of school, but rebounded the following spring. Children in the transition grant programs showed the greatest resilience.

## Transition Methods That Worked

The following activities are ones that were found to be particularly successful in promoting effective transition.

- Written transition agreements between Head Start programs and schools delineated roles and responsibilities for each organization and made commitments to transition explicit.

- Directives from top level school officials set a positive tone and commitment for transition throughout the system.

- Cordial personal relationships between Head Start programs and schools (or being part of the same school system) facilitated transition.

- Exchange meetings between Head Start and kindergarten teachers were effective in clarifying Head Start's goals and program and in informing Head Start teachers of academic and behavioral expectations for kindergarten children.

- Transfer of child names and records to the school alerted the school to the enrollment of Head Start children and enabled the school to begin or continue needed services when the children entered. Records were most effectively used when they reached the teacher.

- Transition programs that functioned throughout the Head Start year - training parents, preparing children, working with school staff, implementing a variety of activities - were more successful than one-shot efforts at the end of the year.

- Programs that provided a supportive network to former Head Start parents whose children were in school were valuable. A parent-to-parent buddy system or staff support helped parents feel secure in the new school environment.

- Training for parents in ways to deal with the school system, what to expect, and how to be assertive in obtaining services for their children (especially children with diagnosed handicaps) were helpful to parents. Both general topics and concrete information and activities were successful. Informing parents of records needed for registration and of dates of registration as well as providing transportation to registration were helpful in enrolling children in a timely fashion. Special meetings and registration for Head Start parents conducted by schools were successful.

- Visits by kindergarten teachers or older children to the Head Start Center provided information to the children and dispelled their fears about school.

- Visits of Head Start children to the kindergarten were a very positive part of the transition process for the children. Visits were most successful when kindergarten teachers were enthusiastic about the visits, prepared activities for the children and welcomed them warmly to the school.

- Summer book lists and activities calendars helped parents ease their children's transition to school as well as maintain readiness skills that might otherwise have declined over the summer.

- Conducting many transition activities produced more awareness and involvement of the school with the Head Start families. When school teachers participated in more transition activities, children had fewer problems adjusting to school.

- Head Start staff were effective advocates for their former children, especially children with diagnosed handicaps, when parents sought their help in obtaining services or reversing school decisions. Head Start staff also assisted school personnel in working with parents whose unrealistic expectations were not beneficial to the child.

## Barriers to Transition

The following were identified as barriers to effective transition:

- The different educational approaches of Head Start and the elementary schools created adjustment problems for children. The child-oriented developmental approach of Head Start contrasted sharply to the structured, academic approach of the schools.

- The failure to transfer records for all Head Start children to the schools and the failure of principals to pass such records on to teachers diminished their potential value in serving the children.

- The inability of some parents to deal successfully with the schools was detrimental to successful transition.

- The inability of some Head Start children to meet the academic demands of the school, even though they were considered better prepared than their low income peers - was a concern to Head Start and school staff alike.

- Hostile, competitive or patronizing attitudes of Head Start or school staff toward each other were detrimental to the establishment of successful transition efforts.